

NSC BRIEFING

31 December 1956

UNREST IN NORTH VIETNAM

I. Although the November outbreak of violence in the North Vietnamese countryside has not yet been matched by disturbances in the cities, we are receiving reports of widely scattered incidents of dissatisfaction among North Vietnam's urban, as well as its rural, population.

A.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] discontent is very strong in Haiphong (North Vietnam's principal port).

B. Intellectuals seem to be particularly restive.

1. We have received reports--still unconfirmed--that students at Hanoi University have staged protest demonstrations.

2. On 15 December Viet Minh authorities suspended a new periodical (Nan Van--"People's Culture"), which had attacked the Communist bureaucracy's repression of individual creativeness.

3. Hanoi charged that the periodical had caused "readers to become discouraged, pessimistic, and dubious of our regime."

4. To guard against any recurrence of the Nan Van affair, the Viet Minh promulgated a new decree tightening its reins on the press.

II. There have been no reports of new violence in the countryside since the November incident, but peasant dissatisfaction persists.

- A. The principal cause seems to be dissatisfaction with the Communist land reform program.
- B. Unrest is particularly strong among Catholics, who comprise some 8% of the population and have been subject to religious persecution.
 - 1. The November uprising occurred in a Catholic population center near Vinh (some 160 miles south of Hanoi) and was suppressed only after troop reinforcements were sent into the area.

III. The Viet Minh leaders are sensitive to the parallel between the recent events in North Vietnam and developments in Eastern Europe.

- A. In domestic broadcasts, they have declared that "important lessons" will be drawn from the Hungarian situation and promised to "pay adequate attention to the people's living conditions."
- B. At the same time, the Viet Minh leaders--who had earlier promised a "democratization" program--now caution against any "excess of democracy" that could be exploited by "enemy saboteurs."

IV. The prospect is for continued disaffection in North Vietnam, and further disorders are a strong possibility.

- A. However, the Viet Minh regime itself is in no immediate jeopardy.
- B. [REDACTED] the regular army (267,000 troops) remains loyal to the regime.
- C. After two bad agricultural years in succession, North

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- V. Perhaps as a means of distracting attention from domestic embarrassments, the Viet Minh may try to incite disorders in the South.
- A. The recent escape of nearly 500 Communists and other dissidents from a South Vietnam security camp (Bien Hoa, north of Saigon) has embarrassed Diem's regime.
- B. Recent attacks by armed bands in the Saigon area may have been Viet Minh-inspired.
- C. However, the contrast between progress under Diem in the South and popular discontent in the North should weaken the impact of any such Viet Minh efforts to undermine the Diem government.